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RUSSIA AND ENGLAND.

BY PROFESSOR ARMINIUS VAMBÉRY.

It is an ungrateful task I have taken upon myself in trying to prove that the present *rapprochement* between England and Russia in Asia is based upon a great fallacy, and that the ultimate result of such an agreement must prove detrimental to the vital interests of Great Britain in the East.

I am well aware of the fact that by enunciating such an opinion I shall incur the disapproval and the displeasure of many of my friends in England. I shall be called an incorrigible alarmist. I am exceedingly sorry to expose myself to such unpleasant criticism, but I cannot on that account alter my conclusion, for the more I reflect upon the facts on which my judgment is based, the more I am convinced of the plausibility of my views. Peace between England and Russia in Asia is certainly a prospect which may well excite the ecstasies of the friends of civilization in the East. But it may be asked : Does the history of nations furnish an instance of two ambitious and expansive powers, which have been strongly antagonistic to each other, suddenly arresting their activity on the pretext that they have reached the goal of their desire, and changing relations of suspicious rivalry into those of amity and friendship ? History does not belie itself, and what cannot be expected from single individuals, is scarcely feasible in the mutual relations of two large nations. As to England, there is no doubt that in certain portions of her outlying colonies and possessions she has already rounded off her frontiers and has become decidedly stationary. Such is the case, for instance, with northwestern India, where England follows a strictly defensive policy without the shadow of ulterior designs, whereas the situation is entirely different in the east and northeast of Hindustan, considering the ill-defined frontier in Nepal, Burma, and in the

north of Cashmere. As to Russia, I do not see any point along her whole frontier line from the Pacific Ocean to the Black Sea where she has reached a definitive basis and met the solid resistance of another well-organized State. I certainly shall not come forward as an advocate of Russian aggression in Asia, but I cannot help saying that the southern frontier of her gigantic empire is, up to the present, far from being well defined, and that it can hardly be presumed that she will stop half way on the road to her long-cherished goal.

It follows, therefore, that Russia cannot and will not arrest her march southwards. She is compelled to continue it by historical and economical reasons. The growth and expansion of the former Duchy of Moscow into the present gigantic empire is the result of a similar process, namely, the gradual absorption of the neighboring districts of Kazan, Astrakhan, and encroachments upon the possessions of Turks, Mongols, Persians, Georgians, Uzbegs, etc. One piece having been duly digested, hunger awoke afresh, and another one was devoured. It is possible that the latest morsel swallowed in Central Asia, being of a tough substance, will not be so easily digested, and that not being tormented for a time by her usual earth hunger, Russia will take a rest. But can such a state of things be reasonably called a definite renunciation of a policy of aggression, and can one expect that henceforward Russian encroachment will never be heard of more? I really envy those who can find delight in such a dream. I cannot. Wherever I examine the Russian frontier in the south of Asia, I find the northern giant constantly moving forward; in fact, ever ready for aggrandizement and increase of power.

To begin with the Ottoman empire. Optimistic politicians might well argue that the forbearance and self-restraint exhibited by Russia in her relations with Bulgaria may be taken as an infallible sign of repudiation of her ancient aggressive policy against Turkey. It does not require particular sagacity, however, to find out that the grapes are here too sour, and that the Russian bear, unwilling to set his teeth on edge, is simply waiting for a better opportunity to pluck the fruit of his former labors. Involuntarily brought to a standstill in European Turkey, Russia is all the more active in the Asiatic portion of the dominion of the Sultan, for only the intentionally blind will fail to see

the agitation carried on along the whole frontier from Batum to Bayazid by her secret and public agents; an agitation spreading all over Asia Minor and extending far into the Arabian desert. Of the Russian influence over the unruly and adventurous Kurds it is needless to speak, as it is an open secret that most of the leading chiefs entertain friendly relations with the frontier officials, and that it was upon the allurements of the Governor General at Tiflis that the grandson of the famous Bedr Khan Bey escaped to Erivan, after having failed in his seditious anti-Turkish movements. Luckily for the politicians at St. Petersburg, the most effective assistance they are favored with comes, in most cases, from England, where, as at the present time, ill-defined humanitarian purposes have raised an outcry against the so-called "Armenian Atrocities," helping, as usual, to bring Russian plans to maturity. Nobody can ignore Turkish misrule in the outlying districts of Asia Minor, nor would it be advisable to conceal the danger and constant trouble arising from the contact between seminomads, like the Kurds, and an industrious agricultural population, like the Armenians. In the present case we have before us a quiet and peaceful Christian community, instigated by heartless political adventurers to rebellion. Can it be wondered at that the Mohammedan authorities, well aware of the constant plots and machinations which undermine their rule in several provinces, have ultimately lost patience and that they have tried to uproot the evil by means adapted to the local circumstances, but revolting to our Western notions? Let us be just, and let us look at the measures taken by humanitarian Christian governments on similar occasions. In suppressing the Sepoy revolution in India, and in inflicting condign punishment on the rebels, England was, certainly against her own will, not always actuated by special feelings of humanity. No clemency was shown after 1849 in Hungary, where women were flogged, young children incarcerated and hundreds handed over to the executioner. In Russia we saw the late peace-loving Czar driving thousands of his fellow creatures into misery and destruction, not for rebelling against his rule, but simply for venturing to persevere in the religion of their fathers. As I say let us be just, and let us not pass a verdict before having heard the accused as well as the plaintiff.

Of course, as matters stand to-day, the politicians on the Neva

have but reluctantly joined England in the new crusade, and unwilling to spoil their good relations with the Porte they are so to say dragged into the controversy. Nor does the ecclesiastical party of Russian Armenians show particular zeal in the support of their brethren in Turkey, for they detect a Protestant spirit in the whole movement, and Protestantism is in their eyes more baneful than Islamism. But there is no misgiving about the fact that the excitement now prevailing in England will ripen the fruit for Russia. Whatever turn the new situation takes in Armenia, Russia will find a plain path across northern Anatolia into Mesopotamia, and the long projected progress towards the South will be greatly facilitated. Judging from recent utterances of the English press, one might think that such an eventuality is much desired by a certain class of politicians, for a paper published in the *Saturday Review*, Dec. 8, 1894, entitled, "Shall We Help Russia Southwards?" very clearly invites the Northern colossus to sweep down, to take Constantinople and to finish with the Turk; for, says the author, "if we give Russia room to expand southwards to the sea, we may relieve the pressure in Asia to an extent that would amply compensate for our concessions." Speculations of this kind are happily not shared by politicians of sound judgment, for if this keynote be struck England might as well hand over at once Persia and Afghanistan to Russia, and she might remove all the obstacles in the way of her rival, in order to secure the possession of India.

However weak and tottering, the existing Mohammedan states will always form a bulwark against Russian designs of aggression, for they must retard and render difficult the execution of her plans, which are not at all desirable for the welfare of Great Britain in Asia. If this is true of the Ottoman Empire, it is even more so of Persia. Russia is already paramount in the political, commercial and social relations of northern Persia, from Khoi to Sarakhs, without a corresponding English counterpoise in the southern half of the country. Can one be so naïve as to imagine that the politicians at St. Petersburg will put a stop to the policy pursued two centuries ago, and that they will invite the English to a brotherly division of the two spheres of action? As long as the present Shah lives the balance might be kept in tolerable order at the Court of Teheran. The ability of Sir Mortimer Durand may contrive to establish the much-desired equi-

librium, but even then it would be hard to frustrate all those minor concessions extorted from the Shah, which, insignificant though they may seem, confirm the constantly increasing superiority of Russia over England there. The older the Shah grows the more he inclines toward the north, as to the party of which he is most afraid ; and as it is to be feared that he will continue to do so in spite of his policy of strict neutrality, it is really difficult to discover the ways and means which will and can lead to an amicable understanding and a lasting agreement between the two rival powers in Persia.

As to Central Asia, I dare say that even the staunchest adherent to optimism and the most firm believer in Russian promises will have to acknowledge the sheer impossibility of a solid and reliable agreement between the two contending powers in Afghanistan. In the first instance we have to put the question : If the Russian schemes do not harbor any mischief against India, what need was there of tampering with the country beyond the Oxus ? And secondly : If Afghanistan is to remain outside the sphere of Russian influence, why did Russia annex Kerki and Kilif, what necessity was there for the strenuous efforts to get near Herat ? And last, but not least : What in the world might have induced the politicians on the Neva to undertake the expensive and troublesome *détour* on the Pamirs ? Only childish credulity will be deceived by the Russian pretext that all this was necessitated by England's erecting the so-called "scientific frontier," and that the whole Russian movement southward is consequently nothing but a defensive measure against an eventual attack of England. It is but the intentionally blind who will fail to see that even the most rabid Jingo had never the idea of aggression in Russian Turkestan, and that, on the contrary, every sober-minded politician, at home as well as in India, had no other desire but to strengthen the frontier toward Afghanistan and not to erect a stepping-stone for further conquests. As matters stand to-day, the same could hardly be said of the attitude of Russia along the whole frontier, extending from Zulfikar to Bosaga, and thence along the upper Oxus to the Little Pamir, where the tendency of a forward movement towards the south is too clear and unmistakable to escape the attention of the unbiased spectator. Of course, in Russian official circles it is constantly denied that this object is

kept in view. They say that the mainspring of Russian policy in that part of the world is merely and exclusively of an economic nature, and that they must fulfill the civilizing duty imposed upon every settled community which is brought in contact with uncivilized and nomadic elements. Unfortunately for Great Britain, it is mostly in England that these subterfuges find most believers, and from this point of view the long series of Russian aggressions has been looked upon as natural and justified by circumstances. But what explanation is to be found for the incessant ogling of Russian frontier officers with the malcontent subjects of the Amir of Afghanistan? What reason can be given for the dealings of Snombtcheffski with Huna-Najar? What means the hospitality accorded to Tshak Tshan and his followers, and to what purpose were the exploits of General Youoff?

Let us be frank, and let us state, once for all, that the present position of Russia in Central Asia entirely excludes the possibility of a peaceful arrangement with England, for it is openly directed against the vital interests of the last named country; and if a verbal or written agreement has been made, it will turn out, under the most favorable circumstances, to be only a truce, which Russia will utilize to complete her means of offense, to clear away certain obstacles, and to undermine quietly that very ground upon which her rival dreams of having acquired a firm footing and a safe standpoint against future complications.

"Lo, the incorrigible pessimist, the inveterate unbeliever in Russian sincerity!" most of my readers will say. Well, I must admit that I shall deserve this title as long as the truth of the Oriental saying, "Ten dervishes have room on one carpet, but not two kings in one country!" remains unrefuted; and as long as I see the Russian exchequer paying millions of hard roubles to cover the deficit incurred by the administration of the Turkestan provinces of the Czar. Our age is not naïve enough to believe in the disinterestedness of civilizing agencies.

It would be the greatest self-delusion to imagine that Russia will spend millions only for the sake of the welfare of Kenghisises, Tajiks, Tarts and Uzbegs, and with no regard to the profit she may derive from her work among them. The wealth of the soil of Central Asia is certainly much greater than hitherto estimated, but taking into account even the speediest development, it can hardly be expected that it will ever meet the costs of the

civil and military administration of the country. We must not be deceived by statistics about the rapid rise of Russian trade in Turkestan, for Russian commercial enterprise consists chiefly of retail-trade, and cannot be compared with the commercial operations of Great Britain in her Asiatic possessions. Even the high-sounding reports about cotton, the staple material export into Russia, must be taken *cum grano salis*, for admitting that this produce has greatly assisted the Russian mills, we cannot believe that it will in future beat the American and Egyptian market, as has been generally reported. The same remark can be applied to other items of Central-Asian produce, and we must conclude that Central Asia is only an *étape* on the road to further conquests, or as a means to be used to produce pressure for the furtherance of schemes laid out somewhere else.

It is from the consideration of such an eventuality that the opinion is gaining ground amongst a certain class of politicians in England that it would be much wiser and more conducive to the welfare of the country if the *causa litis*, England's opposition to Russia on the Bosphorus, were removed at once, and if it could be agreed upon that Russia be allowed to have her own way in Turkey upon condition that she must not approach our Indian frontiers, and that she must renounce further schemes in Central Asia. But such a hope is a delusion. Russia will not swerve, even by a hair's breadth, from her long-conceived plans, and the greater the concessions which are made to her the more quickly and the more easily will she march towards the goal of her desire.

It is a sheer impossibility that Russia's policy in Asia should have taken such a turn. It is easy to understand how such a consummation is much desired in England, where a higher degree of civilization very justly abhors all complications leading to warfare, and where an appeal to arms is resorted to only in utmost necessity. It is this desire which has made the English statesmen shut their eyes to many facts which might have been judged differently by leaders less solicitous for peace. I do not know whether it has been duly considered that, during the reign of the late peace-loving Czar, the Russian outposts have advanced hundreds of miles towards the frontiers of India without causing serious apprehensions to the rulers on the Hooghli and on the Thames? It may well be asked whether this policy of the late peace-loving Czar will not be repeated and imitated by his

peace-loving successor, and whether despite all agreements between London and St. Petersburg English credulity and good faith will not again be deceived by the accomplished fact of fresh Russian conquests. Nobody will doubt that it would be the greatest boon to humanity in general if a good understanding could be established and cemented between England and Russia. It would be a worthy crown to the efforts of the nineteenth century, for the existing rivalry between the two mighty standard-bearers of our modern civilization in Asia constitutes the greatest hindrance to the progress of mankind. But we ought to see clearly the way leading to the realization of this sublime idea, and we ought not to rely on empty words and promises, the shallowness of which must unavoidably strike every student of the politics of Central Asia and every unbiased observer of Russian doings in the East. The ardent desire of Englishmen alone is neither sufficient nor strong enough to contradict the logic of history and to remove difficulties which are deeply rooted in the natural consequences of political exigencies. An agreement might have been possible between Rome and Carthage, but it is hardly feasible between England and Russia.

The recent rumor of an understanding between London and St. Petersburg, for positive news is still lacking, has not been particularly useful to the *prestige* of Great Britain abroad. There are, to begin with, very few serious politicians who believe in the feasibility of the scheme; whereas, many others are apt to judge this marked anxiety for peace in a light rather unfavorable to England. The constant readiness of England to avoid complications by yielding too frequently to her rivals and by trying agreements with most of her adversaries, must sooner or later create the suspicion of hidden weakness and of defective means of an energetic defense. More than three decades ago we find England giving in to her rivals in various parts of the world. England has yielded to Germany in Africa; to France in Siam and in Madagascar; to Russia on the Murghab, on the Heri-rud, on the Pamirs, and in many other places; nay, even to China, to this recently pricked bubble of imposture, on the frontiers of Tibet. Are we not justified in asking: Will it be taken as a sign of strength, if it is ascertained that England is anxious to divide peaceably the Asiatic spoil with her Russian adversary in spite of the sheer impossibility of the realization of such a desire?

Certainly not. I dare say people will argue : If England yields everywhere and to everybody, then she may be freely attacked, for she is wanting in backbone, and complications will certainly increase. And besides is there any palpable reason why the British nation, so rich in vitality, so famous for the patriotism, stability and perseverance of her sons, and so glorious for the noble work done hitherto in many parts of the world, should show pusillanimity and sue for peace at the door of a rival immensely inferior to her ? I cannot remain indifferent on noticing the outburst of joy and satisfaction in the English press, whilst the Russian papers have shown the greatest reserve, nay coolness, in relation to the news of an established agreement with England.

Peace, heavenly peace, is undoubtedly the most sublime and the most blessed gift to Humanity, but it ought not to rest on the airy base of illusions, and still less on the sand-drift of Russian promises. It is particularly the British public, noted for their strong optimistic tendencies and for their unaccountable indifference and carelessness as to foreign politics, that must be earnestly warned against the idle hopes which the news of an agreement between England and Russia in Asia are sure to engender, and have already engendered, I am sorry to say, in many quarters.

A. VAMBÉRY.